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Spain Past and Present

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HST300 Site Visit Reflection

Throughout my time in Madrid, I was able to visit government buildings that contributed to my understanding of the Spanish politics and history. I was lucky enough to visit the Assembly of Madrid, the Congress of Deputies, and The Royal Collections.

The first visit of the trip was to the Assembly of Madrid. This government building is where the legislative decisions about Madrid as an autonomous community are made. The members of the Assembly are elected every four years by the residents of the community in what is called the Spanish Municipal and Regional elections. Their powers only apply to the autonomous community, and can include city planning or housing regulations. Coming into the visit, I thought Assembly was solely responsible for legislation in the city of Madrid, I was surprised to hear that they had a hand in it, but have control of many towns across the region. They answer to the Spanish government, who come in during meetings to hear their new proposed legislation. The Assembly of Madrid is made up of four political parties. The People's Party, the center right party, made up of 71 members, is the whopping majority of the Assembly. The left PSOE and Mas Madrid parties make up another 54 members, and the far right VOX party completes the Assembly with 11.

Additionally, we visited the Congress of the Deputies. It is one of the two entities that make up the Spanish Parliament. It is a part of the legislative branch of the Spanish

government. It is made up of 350 deputies from all four parties, the PP and Socialist parties are the most popular with 136 and 122 respectively. The Congress is responsible for the annual budget of Spain and is key to the checks and balances within the Spanish government. One of the most interesting things that I learned on this visit, was about the failed Coup D'Etat following the dissolving of the Franco regime. The Congressional room was shot up by military who quickly failed in their attempt.

Lastly, I visited the Royal Collections, built directly under the Royal Palace and Cathedral of Madrid. This museum is a collection of royal artifacts and treasures held by the monarchy during its time. This visit was less relevant to politics, but more to the history of the Spanish monarchy before it became a republic. The floors are separated by the two periods, the Habsburgs and the Bourbons. We started on the floor focused on the Habsburgs, with large tapestries and religious connections hung throughout the floor. There were countless paintings related to religious events and figures. The most interesting part of the Habsburg floor was the Roman ruins connected to the city wall. As discussed at other historical visits, when new buildings were built anywhere in Spain, the construction would go around the Roman ruins. There was a large Roman building that butted up to the Madrid city wall. Then, we moved up to the Bourbon floor. It was much more lively and less religious. It was more extravagant with golden artifacts and intricately built items. The most interesting part of this floor was the instruments, I learned that it became more traditional for people to play music during the Bourbon dynasty. This museum contrasted the two most important periods of the Spanish monarchy, before the development of the Republic.

Of these three visits, the Royal Collections was my favorite, but the other two are significant in the story of Spanish history. While the Royal Collections showed me the ways of the past, the Assembly and Congress showed me the ways of the present. The main differences between the Congress and Assmebly were there histories and the powers they hold. The Congress building was built by Isabella II and finished in 1850, while the Assembly building was finished in 1998. The Congress holds more power than the Assembly, however, they both play integral roles to the function of Spain and its current government.